



# NORTHEAST IDAHO

BONNEVILLE, BUTTE, CLARK, CUSTER, FREMONT, JEFFERSON, LEMHI, MADISON, & TETON COUNTIES

## LABOR FORCE & EMPLOYMENT

The average unemployment rate for December 1999 to November 2000 for the Bonneville Labor Market Area (LMA) is 3.4 percent, down seven-tenths of a percentage point from the 1999 average of 4.1 percent. The *Civilian Labor Force* showed an increase of almost 3,000 over the year, with total employment increasing by over 3,300, therefore dropping the unemployment rate. Since the Census Bureau projects a population increase of almost 1,100 during this time period, the increase most probably came from new teenage entrants and more women entering the workforce. In addition, retirees could have accounted for part of the rise, since Social Security no longer places a limitation on their earnings for benefit eligibility.

*Nonfarm Payroll Jobs* showed an increase of 2,080 jobs over the year, over 1,800 coming from the *Service-Producing Industries*. *Services* and *Government Administration* received the largest increases collectively at just fewer than 1,000 jobs. *Retail Trade* came in a close third, adding 360 jobs to the LMA. *Business Services*, *Social Services*, and *Engineering & Management* sectors were the largest contributors to the increase in *Services*. The LMA, especially Bonneville County, has seen an influx of new businesses as the Ammon area opened and expanded after the construction of Edwards Cinemas. The Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory (INEEL) has enjoyed steady, progressive growth since the new contractor, Bechtel BWXT, Idaho, took over in late 1999. The *Goods-Producing Industries* showed a slight increase of 210 jobs, almost all coming from the *Construction* industry. Plentiful resi-

Northeast Idaho Table 1: Labor Force & Employment

Bonneville, Bingham, Butte, & Jefferson Counties	Projected 2000	1999	% Change From Last Year
INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE			
Civilian Labor Force	83,353	80,500	3.5
Unemployed	2,856	3,321	-14.0
% of Labor Force Unemployed	3.4%	4.1%	
Total Employment	80,497	77,179	4.3
JOBS BY PLACE OF WORK			
<b>Nonfarm Payroll Jobs**</b>	61,870	59,790	3.5
<b>Goods-Producing Industries</b>	9,230	9,020	2.3
Mining & Construction	4,020	3,830	5.0
Manufacturing	5,210	5,190	0.4
Food Processing	2,810	2,850	-1.4
Industrial and Commercial Mach.	540	500	8.0
All Other Manufacturing	1,860	1,840	1.1
<b>Service-Producing Industries</b>	52,640	50,770	3.7
Transportation & Communication	2,340	2,060	13.6
Wholesale Trade	6,070	5,910	2.7
Retail Trade	11,510	11,150	3.2
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	1,870	1,860	0.5
Services	20,780	20,190	2.9
Government Administration	4,920	4,520	8.8
Government Education	5,150	5,080	1.4
**Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month			

dential and commercial construction has kept the industry busy and continued development is still visible in the area.

The only decrease in the area was found in the *Food Processing* sector of the *Manufacturing* industry, showing a decrease of 40 jobs for the year. Installation of new technology and low commodity prices eliminated the need for some workers.

## 2000 YEAR-IN-REVIEW

As a whole, the year has been reflective of the national trend of a secure and growing economy. Unemployment rates have decreased and jobs have been plentiful. The Bonneville LMA has seen much growth in the retail industry, at least as far as new entrants; though this has stretched the employment numbers thinner in all existing retail and some smaller retailers have now gone out of business. Restaurants, department and specialty stores, and cinemas have received most of the retail changes this year. Bechtel BWXT, Idaho has helped job creation, as they vowed to assist the state in economic development. Many local businesses have been grateful recipients of its generosity. The following overview of the counties shows happenings for the year 2000.

## **Bonneville County**

- The O.E.Bell building, once a junior high school that sat vacant for the last 20 years, went under major renovation estimated at \$2.5 million. It now houses the Eastern Idaho Economic Development Council, Bank of Idaho, Attorney E.W. Pike, Little Deli, and other businesses. A location or “home away from home” has been approved in the building for the Department of Commerce to use as necessary when in the area. The building is still under renovation and the former style has been maintained for its unique grandeur. Located close to downtown Idaho Falls, it is still centrally located in the town and has been a help to many businesses needing expansion.
- Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center, the only hospital in Idaho Falls, expanded its facility (a \$42 million project) to include a larger emergency room. It also added footage to many of the other units, a total of 70,000 square feet. The hospital services Blackfoot and the northeastern part of the state in addition to the Idaho Falls area.
- With the entrance of Edwards Cinemas, most of the local theatres have closed doors or reduced ticket prices. Edwards boasts 14 screens and opened in the Ammon area in 1999. Since that time, the area developed very quickly, bringing in new stores such as Ameritel Inn, International House of Pancakes, Johnny Carino’s, Gameworld, Cubby’s, Wingers, Texas Roadhouse Grill, Sportsman Warehouse, Famous Footwear, Fox Den, Typhoons, Denver Mattress Company, and Taco Bell—to name a few.
- The Gap and Old Navy opened across the street from Edwards in the Grand Teton Mall. ZCMI was purchased by May Company and is still located in the Grand Teton Mall. Pacific Sunwear, Chinese Gourmet Express, and Coachman’s Gifts are new entrants into the mall. However, many shops have left the mall due to rising costs and the food court has seen much turnover this year.
- A Student Union Building of 40,000 square feet was added to University Place, giving students a place to study and eat, and adding a bookstore and drop-in computer lab. A separate preschool and child-care program with limited enrollment was added to accommodate students and staff. University Place offers classes from Idaho State University, University of Idaho, Ricks College, and Brigham Young University. It services many stu-

dents in the area who are unable to attend the classes on campus.

- Several business centers are being revitalized or will begin construction. The St. Leon Business Park made improvements of an estimated \$1.1 million, which helped some businesses to expand and added several new companies. Dane Watkins is in the middle of doing a complete makeover to his development on River Parkway, involving several businesses. A Victorian look will be the new style and parking will be better as utilities are being buried underground. The Skyline Mall made renovations in several stores, expanding sales floors in several businesses. The Teton Plaza and Hall Park remodeled the storefronts, displaying similar design for their set of stores. Taylor Crossing on the River (of McNeil Development) will start construction of a Georgian village between the river and Utah Avenue early spring of 2001. Clearing of current residences and businesses on the river has almost been completed for starting the development.
- Expansion of existing retail businesses and the construction of new buildings in new locations have made way for other businesses to move and change. For example, Chaffin RV is now located on Holmes Avenue, Madsen’s Ben Franklin is on West Broadway, and Hertz Car Sales is located on Lincoln and Woodruff.
- Center Partners housed a new building located just past their existing building. Hundreds of new call center workers were put to work and continued progression of contracts keeps the company hiring to fill its needs. Center Partners now has over 400 employees. The call centers have played a major role in decreasing the unemployment rate in the LMA over the year.

## **Bingham County**

- The Snake River Cheese Plant will now be operating under the name of Suprema Specialties at the former Beatrice Cheese location. The new company specializes in Italian cheeses and sells to food service distributors such as SYSCO. This will help local dairymen and laid-off cheese workers in the area. The company has also been the biggest industrial user of water and sewage systems.
- Blackfoot’s Wal-Mart is now a Supercenter. Renovation of the building doubled its size and doubled its employees. The store now employs over 330 people. The store added a deli, meat counter and

bakery, hair salon, bank, and optical center to create one-stop shopping for customers.

#### **Butte, Clark, Jefferson, Fremont, and Teton Counties**

- Butte County's Bechtel BWXT, Idaho, the INEEL's main contractor and the LMA's largest employer, has been a great presence since the beginning of its operation late in 1999. Bechtel has mapped out the next three years of goals and objectives, including an intense study of improving the ability to predict how underground pollution moves. Nuclear shipments are leaving the state on a regular basis, safety statistics are improving, and the laboratory now has a more focused direction and investment in the community. Research is being directed towards energy, science, environmental cleanup, and national security. Over \$1.7 million has been invested into corporate-funded research at the INEEL. Also, \$1.4 million was invested in economic development activities across the state.
- Arco (Butte County) received funds to start the construction of a one-mile greenbelt along Highway 20/26. A sail from a decommissioned nuclear submarine will be displayed in front of the future museum that will sit near the greenbelt. The sail already sits close to the site to which it will soon be moved.
- The Arco/Butte Business Incubation Center is helping many businesses expand or start up in Butte County. Such stores as Cowboy Leather have moved in and are doing so well that they will soon need to expand their locations.
- Fremont County's ML Technologies opened mid-year, adding many jobs to the community. ML Technologies is a high-tech company specializing in information technology services, engineering services, and computer products.
- FairPoint Communications merged with Fremont Telcom (Fremont County) late this year. The merger was to bring communication customers the latest technology and high quality services, starting with businesses. However, the main headquarters just closed this location
- The Ashton Travel Plaza (Fremont County) changed to Valley Food and Fuel, and added a sit-down café for residents and travelers. Many other stores in the area and surrounding counties have changed ownership or started up new. Dave's Arctic in Driggs (Teton County) is now the Racin' Sta-

tion, expanding merchandise lines in snow and motorcycle equipment. Dragonfly Toys changed names to Dot Toys & Children's Apparel and added a line of children's clothing. Jackson Hole Heating and Sheet Metal opened a shop in Victor (Teton County) for HVAC and sheet metal fabrication.

- Jefferson County's T&M Potato expanded its operation by moving to a new location next to Rigby Produce. T&M plans to add 175 new jobs to the business over the next five years. It sells pre-baked potatoes in grocery and department stores.

#### **Madison County**

- A change to Ricks College was announced in June. The college will soon be Brigham Young University-Idaho (BYU-Idaho) and is undergoing the proper procedure for status change right now. Students will soon be able to get a four-year baccalaureate degree at the college; integrated and specialized degrees will be gradually added at specified time frames over the next five years. The college will also incorporate internships and off-campus workstudy programs to be part of required degree curriculums. The college hopes to be established as BYU-Idaho by fall 2001. The college plans to gradually increase the current 8,900 students to the potential capacity of 15,000 over the next five years.
- With the announcement of the college status change, many businesses and residents have been interested in new prospects. A large Idaho Falls company, Melaleuca, Inc., purchased the vacant Broulims store that sat empty for two years, and is now renovating it for expansion of its Idaho Falls business. It hopes to house 200 product support specialists over the year 2001. The company sells health and beauty aide products worldwide. Melaleuca is training its staff for the Rexburg location right now and plans to have them working by January.
- The Madison Economic Development Council has been busy planning the Rexburg Business Center. The city is currently negotiating a contract with a California manufacturer of medical testing systems that plans to put on 500 employees in the first year. Property in the business center has been donated as an incentive for the company to locate in Rexburg. Just behind the business center, Artco, one of Rexburg's largest employers, added a Personal Touch line earlier in the year. The line added

200 employees to the business and specializes in personalized paper goods and gift items.

#### **Custer and Lemhi Counties**

- From the fall of 1999 to October of this year, mining operations have been on the decline in these two counties. Meridians Gold's Beartrack Mine stopped operations late 1999 through early 2000, and now employs a skeleton clean-up crew, contributing to the loss of many jobs in the county. Thompson Creek Mine just recently laid-off around 40 workers in October and will continue to gradually lay off workers over the next few years as the mine will eventually be shut down. These mineworkers were accustomed to higher paying jobs with benefits. Some worked for the government when the area experienced larger-than-normal fires during the summer and fall months. Some have been able to move to other mine locations to continue working for the same company that laid them off.
- Salmon, with the help of Bechtel BWXT, Idaho, now has an Economic Developer. Pete Stasiak has been fully involved with the needs of the city and is currently involved in creation of an incubator center that would help entrepreneurs and those needing expansion to have a place to house their business. He is also conducting impact studies on Lemhi County as a result of the fires and has determined that a majority of the businesses were deeply hurt by the disaster.
- Both counties are preparing for the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial that will take place in 2003. Because of well-known publicity of the event, many tourists are planning visits before the anticipated date. A Lewis and Clark Information Center was erected in the Burger King parking lot this summer. The state is now involved in upgrading roads, expanding and improving historical sites, museums and visitors centers, and promoting various bicentennial events and projects. Salmon is also planning a Sacajawea Interpretive Center since Salmon and Orofino will be the most visited areas in the celebration.
- Salmon also received several new businesses. A new department store named Duckwall-ALCO Stores, Inc. started this summer with 25 employees, and Idaho Falls' TSI added a call center near the airport with six employees and room for another ten to twenty.

#### **General Northeast Idaho**

- The Census employed many people this year throughout the area with Idaho Falls being the central office for Southeast Idaho. Hiring and training took place in the Idaho Falls Job Service office along with several other sites in outlying areas. The Census saw higher responses than it had seen in past surveys.
- Drought brought unwanted results in several areas including Butte and Custer Counties, and they became some of the first to be declared drought disaster areas. Dryness caused poor yields in dryfarm crops and took a toll on the area's wheat harvest.
- Wildfires ripped through Idaho this year, causing major damage to wilderness and economies. The Salmon-Challis Fire District battled over 439,000 acres of wildfires before full containment was reached. That was 34.3 percent of all Idaho fires this year. The Idaho Falls Fire District battled almost the same acreage at over 414,000 acres (32.3 percent of all Idaho fires). In total, 66.6 percent of all Idaho fires took place in the Eastern to Northeast Idaho areas—over 216,000 acres alone in one of the nation's largest fires, the Clear Creek Complex fire (Lemhi and Custer counties). The fires required the help of smoke jumpers, helicopter pilots, military personnel, and firefighters from other countries. Additional federal workers were also put to work as security personnel, heavy equipment operators, and supply runners. Repercussions of the fires included cancellation of annual events such as Sacajawea Days (the first scheduled for the area), and Salmon's Balloon Fest; FEMA allowances in many counties; and financial damage to businesses. The major areas of impact included hunting and fishing guides and tourism sectors. Many other businesses were hurt as people were advised to stay out of the smoke and away from the fire crews. Road closures also hurt many who commuted to work or traveled through the area on a regular basis.

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